



Postpartum

Postpartum is a word used for the time that begins with your baby's birth. The first six weeks postpartum is a time of healing, learning, and adjusting. It is an exciting time but also a time of anxiety and fatigue.

8 Things you Need to Know About Taking Care of Yourself After Your Baby Is Born

1. Initially you will be very excited and this excitement may get in the way of rest. Hospitals have their routines and these also get in the way of rest. Your baby will need to nurse at all hours of the day and night. Well-meaning visitors can get in the way of rest too. In short, you will soon be very tired even before you go home. You will have to make time to rest. Stay in your pajamas and robe the first week. Sleep whenever the baby sleeps. Unplug the phone. Tell your friends that you will call when you are ready for guests.
2. You are healing from a normal but major life change. Don't be surprised by your sore aching muscles. Giving birth is hard work. It is important that you eat a healthy, well-balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids. Continue your prenatal vitamins during this time. If you are breastfeeding, you will continue your vitamins until you wean your baby. After that remember, everyone benefits from a multivitamin with folic acid every day.
3. If you have stitches, these will swell and ache too. The vaginal area is referred to as the perineum. If you have stitches in your perineum, you will probably use ice packs off and on for a few days to limit the swelling. Usually your health care provider will order pain medicine for you as well. Later, heat will be recommended to speed healing. This can be accomplished by soaking in a clean tub of extra warm water and then by drying the area with air from a hair dryer on warm setting.
4. The stitches from a cesarean delivery are painful too. When you get home, continue with the instructions that the hospital nurses gave you about deep breathing and coughing and standing up straight.
5. While your baby is learning to breastfeed, your nipples may become sore. As your nipples toughen, this will lessen. But if you are having difficulties you could develop cracked and bleeding nipples. Call your health care provider at once if you and the baby are having any problems with latch-on (getting the baby properly positioned to nurse). Ask to speak to a lactation consultant. The first two (2) to five (5) days, your baby is receiving colostrum from your breasts. This is important nutrition for your newborn. But soon thereafter your milk will come in. When this happens your breasts may feel hard, hot and sore. This is called engorgement. The best cure for engorgement is nursing your baby. Eventually your body will learn how much milk to make for each feeding and you will experience less engorgement. You will need to drink more fluids while you are breastfeeding and eat a well-balanced diet.
6. There a number of other physical changes going on in your body at this time. Your uterus is healing and shrinking down to its pre-pregnant size. This may cause you to feel strong menstrual-like cramps. You will pass menstrual-like blood called lochia until the uterus is healed. Your abdominal muscles have been stretched and will take some months to tighten up again. As you body removes the extra fluid that you carried while you were pregnant, you will urinate more often.
7. The hormones that supported your pregnancy will quickly drop back to pre-pregnant levels. This hormone shift creates feelings of sadness. Add to that, you are sore in various places and very tired. Is it any wonder that you may feel sad or blue? Know that these feelings are normal as long as they last only a few days and respond to rest. Let others help you especially during this time. Let your partner change that diaper in the middle of the night and bring the baby to you to nurse. Let your mother sit with her grandchild while you go for a walk or take a nap. Accept that casserole from your neighbor. You may not need lots of visitors, but you do need lots of help. If your blues last more than two weeks, seem to be getting worse instead of better, or if you are having thoughts or fantasies about hurting yourself or your baby, you may have a condition called postpartum depression. This is more serious than the usual baby blues. It requires professional support and medication. It is nothing to be ashamed of. Please call your health care provider if you are having symptoms of postpartum depression.
8. Believe it or not, you will want to have sex again. Most women feel healed enough and have stopped bleeding enough to consider sex around four weeks postpartum. Know this. You can get pregnant if you have unprotected intercourse at this time. It is not likely, but it is possible. Condoms are a good idea not only for contraception but also for protection against infection since most women are not completely healed until six weeks postpartum. Talk to your health care provider about contraception before resuming sex.



9 Postpartum Warning Signs

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| 1. A fever of 101° Fahrenheit or higher. | 6. Cracked or bleeding nipples. |
| 2. Flu-like body aches. | 7. Red streaks in your breasts. |
| 3. Foul smelling vaginal bleeding. | 8. Extremely tender nipples or breasts. |
| 4. Increasing abdominal tenderness or cramping. | 9. Unusually severe headache, leg pain, chest pain, or difficulty breathing. |
| 5. Increasing redness, swelling, tenderness, or pus along any stitches. | |